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Source: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Apr., 1981, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Apr., 1981), pp. 87-98

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

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KINSHIP STRUCTURES AND THE GENESIS GENEALOGIES

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THIS paper is an introduction to a number of arguments concerning the anthropological interpretation of Genesis, especially the materials between the genealogy of Terah's descendants (Gen. 11: 27-32) and the genealogies of the Edomites (ending Gen. 36). The approach of the essay is that of formal kinship analysis.¹ Specifically, the analysis considers patterns of kinship relationship and principles of political organization which result from the combined genealogical materials on the key patriarchs of Israel. The work is part of my broader interest in themal development, kinship structures, and cultural contexts of biblical materials.² This particular analysis considers Genesis as a sociological model in its own right, for there is remarkable unity of relational principle behind the particular kinship statements of the various sources in Genesis and the redaction of the sources.

Throughout the following discussion, the stories of Genesis, including genealogies, are viewed as a concatenation rather than as a narrative.³ One major thesis of this paper, indeed, is that the textual relations of the materials considered form a "sociology of Judah" rather than a "history of Israel." Of course, the stories of the three main patriarchs tell us of numerous kinds of kinship relationships, not simply of lines of genealogical succession. But the emphasis here is upon the political functions of stories, including non-genealogical materials, rather than upon the historicity of particular kin lists.⁴ Further, the materials are shown either to indicate directly or to

¹ Perhaps the best introduction to "formal" analysis in anthropology is the leading work of C. Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1963), pp. 277-323. See also R. Needham, *Structure and Sentiment: A Test Case in Social Anthropology* (Chicago, 1962), for a major discussion of formal analysis of kinship systems, inspired by the controversy over Lévi-Strauss's *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (Paris, 1949). Other pertinent background materials include E. Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology* (London, 1961) and R. Needham, ed., *Rethinking Kinship and Marriage* (London, 1971).

² Some of the key biblical analyses in the anthropological literature include: M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London, 1966); E. Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London, 1969); see also M. Carroll, "Leach, Genesis, and Structural Analysis: A Critical Evaluation," *American Ethnologist* 4 (1977): 663-77; R. Marshall "Heroes and Hebrews: The Priest in the Promised Land," *American Ethnologist* 6 (1979): 772-90. These writers have all studied biblical materials in symbolic and structural analysis.

[JNES 40 no. 2 (1981)]

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0022-2968/81/4002-0001\$01.00.

My intention in this and subsequent related papers is to link structural analysis with "thematic" investigations inspired by the work of M. Opler (see "Themes as Dynamic Forces in Culture," *American Journal of Sociology* 51 [1945]: 198-206; "An Application of the Theory of Themes in Culture," *Journal of the Washington Academy of Sciences* 36 [1946]: 137-66; "Some Recently Developed Concepts Relating to Culture," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 4 [1948]: 107-22; "The Context of Themes," *American Anthropologist* 51 [1949]: 323-25; "Component, Assemblage, and Theme in Cultural Integration and Differentiation," *American Anthropologist* 61 [1959]: 955-64).

³ This orientation is taken to underscore the notion that Genesis deals with basic social theory. It is common to treat biblical materials from a "sociological" perspective, but more unusual, perhaps, to consider any part of the Bible as "social theory" per se. If we recall the significance in all Jewish life of the *Torah* (as "instruction" or as law) and *Mishnah* (as "repetition" or as recited commentary on the law), then the approach seems less of an innovation.

⁴ Most of early genealogical analysis and some recent work concentrates on matters of historical validity or the interpretation of actual "tribal configurations" in Canaan; see A. Alt, *Essays on Old*

imply some ideal political relationships common to anthropologically known contemporary systems. This is especially true when the materials of the whole redaction are taken as a single system, although the basic elements of the kinship constructs suggested in the redaction are common to all of the source materials from which it was created. In some recent studies the different functions of genealogical materials have been stressed.⁵ This work follows the suggestion of R. Wilson that the functions of genealogies in literary or historical representation may not be presumed.⁶ However, beyond the basic political functions of certain genealogies, the rich kinship material of stories of other characters may also be employed to expand the genealogical skeleton to a rather full-blown "social model."

Consideration is given here to "family-cycle" descriptions as metaphors of kinship structure—where specific stories emphasize appropriate and inappropriate behavior, they manifest multiple, sometimes conflicting, premises about the ways of achieving and maintaining kinship (corporate) purity. Working from a number of empirical generalizations about the basic kinship relations of the "Genesis system" it is impossible to deduce a structure to account for features of kin and territorial association. The term "family cycle" is used to denote the ways individuals move through the situations of their lifetimes, particularly as they cross critical points of juncture. These "life crisis" points in family cycles—births, deaths, rites of passage—are as important to the relationships of the system as they are to the individuals in the system, at least when we view what is depicted in a story from an anthropological perspective.⁷ Thus, a birth may finalize a contract, legitimize a marriage, or change the nature of inheritance within a group. If life crisis situations are in some instances "symbols" of changing relationships between individuals and groups, then the overall symbolic analysis of kinship structures hinges upon common elements of "sentiment" surrounding basic genealogical ties. In some cases sociological facts may rest in historical or political fictions, so that when we look upon a kin-based system we view "justifications"—relations stated from a specific point of view for particular social purposes.⁸

It is of great benefit to analysis that literary patterns exist which aid in the delineation of "themes" or premises which surround the actions of passages through the family cycle. The richly woven stories of Genesis form a highly stylized "ethnography," a symbolic map of behaviors both common in the culture and

Testament History and Religion (Oxford, 1966), pp. 1-77; M. Noth, *Das System der Zwölf Stämme Israels*, Beitrag zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament 4, no. 1 (Stuttgart, 1930); A. Mayes, *Israel in the Period of the Judges*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series, no. 5 (Naperville, Illinois, 1974).

⁵ See R. Wilson, "The Old Testament Genealogies in Recent Research," *JBL* (1975): 169-89, for a review of genealogical approaches and an evaluation of current research.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 172-73.

⁷ See R. Abrahams, "Some Aspects of Levirate" in J. Goody, ed., *The Character of Kinship* (London, 1973), p. 167, where this point is forcefully made with the levirate case of Judah's sons in Gen. 38—although Abrahams shows that the levirate concentrates on

individual identity, that identity is maintained through the precise obligations of relationship, and the precise scenarios of obligation in the context of changes such as deaths and births within particular families.

⁸ This view of biblical history does not rest in the fundamental accuracy of events depicted in a story development but treats the history (composed from sources) as a reflection of social ideals stated in common metaphors of the day. The many potential levels of understanding which may be developed from Genesis run far beyond the confines of kinship analysis; but the kinship representations of Genesis are central to the work, as well as to the theology it introduces. To the extent that these representations form a coherent, well-defined system for human relationships, we must presume they detail elements of an intentional political account.

extraordinary in the relational field against which they are cast—that of God, princes, and high-born women. Certain story patterns and material contents of Genesis seem especially directed toward underscoring kinship principles. Thus, both *formal* and *content* analysis contribute to the overall perspective of the kinship discussion. Since this paper stresses the formal, it should be understood that many substantive implications in the areas of economic, political, and theological analysis, lightly touched upon here, await detailed investigation.⁹

WIFE-GIVERS AND WIFE-TAKERS

A standard kinship diagram (fig. 1) indicates key relationships between individuals who are important to the Genesis account of the patriarchs. Throughout the chart, siblings are depicted in order of birth from left to right. Co-wives (not all shown on the chart) are represented in a convenient order, depending upon their relationships to the patrilineages involved. These conventions result in a chart which is superficially similar to those of Leach and Vawter.¹⁰ However, Leach's treatment of the patriarchs does not fully stress birth order and other character ascriptions, and Vawter's is not specifically oriented to kinship problems. Still, both of these other analyses have contributed to my discussion and should be consulted by the reader.

The basic relationships posed in the kinship diagram of the patriarchs hinge upon the association of Abram, Nahor, and Haran as brothers descended from Terah. It is therefore of importance to note the literary sources through which the redactor of Genesis emphasizes these relationships. The pertinent sections of Genesis are chapters 11 and 12, both of which involve combinations of *Priestly* (P) and *Yahwist* (J) materials.¹¹ Chapter 11 begins with the "tower of Babel" story, derived from the J source, and proceeds through the P genealogy of Shem. The genealogy (Gen. 11: 10-26) ends with the direct association of Abram, Nahor, and Haran as sons of Terah. Politically, this genealogical bridge links the descendants of Terah to the "blessed" Shemites of the Noah story (see Gen. 9:26), a critical link to the "history" which is about to unfold.

⁹ Structuralism has been most concerned with the analysis of myth. Most of Genesis yields complex but intriguing results when subjected to structural analysis—by Lévi-Straussian standards almost classic results. That is, much of Genesis, including the materials well past chapter 2, constitute mythic material in literary configurations which offer a rich, almost musical array of constraints on meaning. Therefore, it seems appropriate to note the following requisites of the structural analysis of myth (drawn from Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology: Volume II* [New York, 1976]: p. 65):

1. A myth must never be interpreted on one level only. No privileged explanation exists, for any myth consists in an inter-relation of several explanatory levels.
2. A myth must never be interpreted individually, but in its relationship to other myths which, taken together, constitute a transformation group.
3. A group of myths must never be interpreted alone, but by reference: (a) to other groups of

myths; and (b) to the ethnography of the societies in which they originate. For, if the myths transform each other, a relation of the same type links . . . the different levels involved in the evolution of all social life. These levels range from the forms of techno-economic activity to the systems of representations, and include economic exchanges, political and familial structures, aesthetic expression, ritual practices, and religious beliefs.

If this essay violates these dicta by reason of its limited scope, it is in the hope that the well-defined characteristics of the Genesis kinship representations will prompt new views of the broader cultural background of the era of Israel's formation.

¹⁰ E. Leach, *Genesis as Myth and Other Essays* (London, 1969), p. 48; B. Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York, 1977), p. 220.

¹¹ In general, I have followed the source breakdown of Genesis provided in J. Carpenter and G. Harford, *The Composition of the Hexateuch* (London, 1902), pp. 509-21.

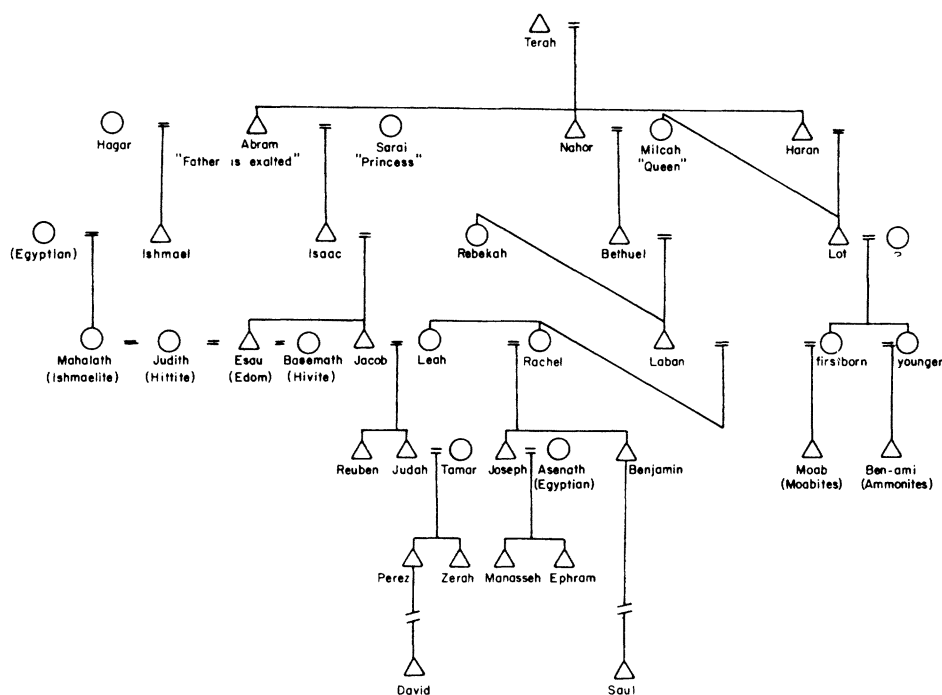


FIG. 1—Basic kinship diagram of Genesis kinship materials

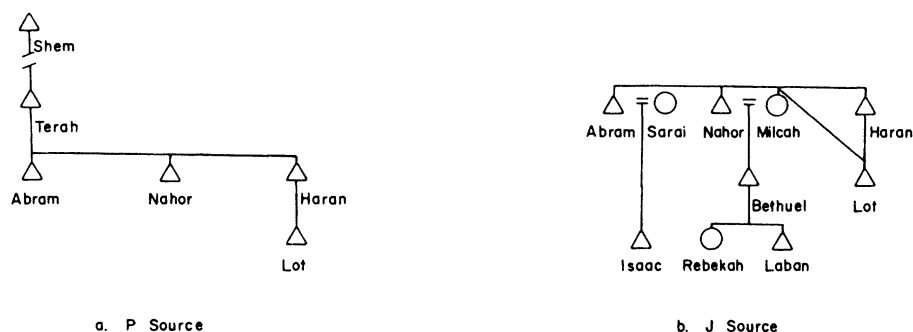


FIG. 2—Basic genealogical ties stressed in the Priestly and Yahwist sources of Genesis

Immediately following the Priestly genealogy of Shem a combined segment performs three critical functions for the coming patriarchal cycles: (1) the relationships between Terah, Abram, Nahor, and Haran are restated (P source); (2) two women, Sarai and Milcah, are tied into the genealogy (J source); and (3) the movement toward Canaan of Terah, Abram, Sarai, and Lot (who replaces Haran) commences (P

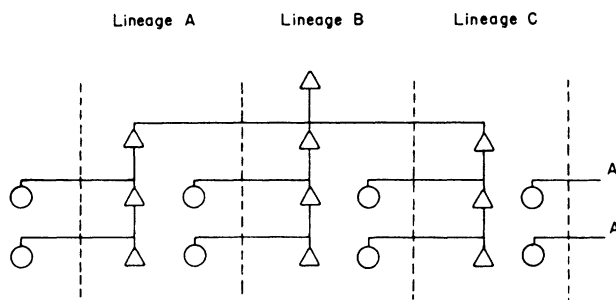


FIG. 3—Ideal pattern of kin ties of the Genesis system suggestive of a circulating connubium structure

source). All of this is accomplished in a mere five verses, after which Terah dies in Haran (northwest Mesopotamia) without completing the journey to Canaan (Gen. 11: 27-32).

If we separate the P and J materials of Genesis 11, it is clear that the direct genealogical ties of the Priestly source (fig. 2a) are augmented by affinal relations in the Yahwist tradition (fig. 2b). Thus, from the Yahwist perspective, relationships created through women are stressed, even though general links between Abram and Nahor (Gen. 22: 20-24) and Abram and Lot (Gen. 13: 8, "for we are kinsmen") are recognized. What is significant is that the specific relationships between Abram and Lot are stressed and "clarified" (in Gen. 12: 4b-5) by the redactor through the insertion of P material. In the remaining sections of Genesis, then, the elaborate relationships of descent and marriage which define additional patrilineal divisions and alliances are subsumed by the interests of Shemites, and specifically Terahites. Further, the Terahites are used to establish a model of interaction which later gives way to the association of Israel's sons. The significance of women in these materials cannot be overstressed—women are included in the accounts everywhere because they are critical to the "ideal" relational system which is represented through the sources.

A graphic representation of the kind of "ideal" relationship which is established through the patriarchal marriages is shown in fig. 3. Readers familiar with kinship will recognize the characteristic of "matrilateral cross-cousin marriage," and the potential elements of what is usually called a "circulating connubium" or "indirect exchange of women."¹² In brief, when Abram, Nahor, and Haran are considered totally independent patrilineages, then *alliances* are identified between adjacent lines through the marriage of Milcah to Nahor (a highborn woman of Haran to a man of Nahor), and through the marriages of Rebekah to Isaac and Leah/Rachel to Jacob (highborn

¹² See R. Needham, *Structure and Sentiment* (Chicago, 1962), pp. 7-8, 97-98. It should be noted that the basic representation of the connubium is cyclical and so does not imply absolute differentiation by rank of the patrilineages in an alliance group—A is above B is above C is above A. The differentiation of brothers or sisters by rank (as implied in order of listings or as directly stated)

operates on a non-cyclical principle. In a large system the circulation of women may actually be cyclical, while the expressed native model is non-cyclical. In the case of Genesis the stated social order is non-cyclical, while the sources suggest that a cyclical system may have been in operation. See also Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1963), pp. 311-12.

women of Nahor to men of Abram). The rank order of "wife-givers" to "wife-takers" suggested in the bulk of material concerning these marriages is reinforced by the rank order of brothers ascribed in the account of Terah's descendants. That is, Abram is the highest ranking "brother" of the P material, and the focal patrilineage of the J material. Whether the genealogical links asserted in any of the sources are real or fictive is of no concern. But the fact that explicit lineal relations are drawn to particular apical ancestors introduces a premise of *endogamous preference* into the marriage system. The premise might be stated as follows: men should marry within some primary patrilineal association, but marriages outside this association may be justified if patrilineal ties of the group providing the woman are not too distant.¹³

The premise of endogamous preference is manifested generally in the covenant of circumcision. In any marriage in which the closest kin tie to the wife is traced through the brother of a lineal kinsmen (i.e., the woman is a parallel cousin) the premise is in force. Many specific examples of the premise are scattered throughout Genesis, including the statements about the relationship between Abraham and Sarah (Gen. 20: 12), the acquisition of Isaac's wife (Gen. 24), and statements about the wives of Esau (Gen. 26: 34-35; 28: 6-9). Indeed, it is shown clearly that although wives might be taken from distantly related groups, as with Esau's first two wives, a closer degree of relationship was preferred.¹⁴

Once a relationship is established between groups through a marriage, subsequent marriages solidify the alliance which has been formed. The folk expressions of these practices vary widely cross-culturally, but Rebekah's observations on her preferences for the marriage of her sons (Gen. 27: 46) and Isaac's immediate action ordering Jacob to his "mother's brother's house" (Gen. 28: 1-5) are not unusual. Thus, alliances could be established by taking a wife from a closely related patrilineage and maintained by adherence to a matrilineal cross-cousin marriage preference, at least as stated in the "ideal." In actuality, the Genesis materials indicate a broad pattern of relationships, including the Ishmaelites and Edomites, modified by the successive generational associations of God's covenant. From the point of view of the redactor of Genesis (and probably also the sources individually) Egypt represents a detached and powerful

¹³ F. Barth poses the basic elements of Near Eastern kinship systems as a structural type different from both the African "segmentary" systems and the southeast Asian "alliance" systems (see "Descent and Marriage Reconsidered" in J. Goody, ed., *The Character of Kinship* [London, 1973], pp. 6-7, 11-16). The Genesis materials support his discussion of these systems in which the differentiation between agnates, matrilineals, and affines is clouded by practice of patrilineal parallel cousin marriages. Thus within a group of patrilineal lines numerous complex marriages may provide alliance connections, although from the perspective of an individual it might be difficult to identify lines to which one is an "affine" or "agnate." As a result, in situations of stress, a pattern of factional alliance cannot be predicted, since the mobilization of support for different sides of a dispute may depend upon the focal individuals of the dispute, and the individual relationships of marriage and lineal identification

opposed in the situation. For a large "endogamous" system such as Israel, the preference which sustains alliance and identification of the whole also provides a mechanism for creating a close affinal relation from a distant agnatic relation on the individual level. So it also serves to counter the strife which characterizes the relationship of "brothers."

¹⁴ This passage of judgment is simply contrastive to the forthcoming marriages of Jacob within the Terahites; cf. J. Goldin, "The Youngest Son or Where Does Genesis 38 Belong," *JBL* 96 (1977): 36. In this context it might also be noted that the patrilineal parallel cousin prescription of Num. 36 (the daughters of Zelophehad) is an exception to the broader pattern of permissible marriages, tied to the maintenance of equity within the major divisions of Israel (see Num. 27: 1-11). This provision for the "heritage" through daughters of a man with no sons clearly implies the less stringent character of the normal marriage pattern in Israel.

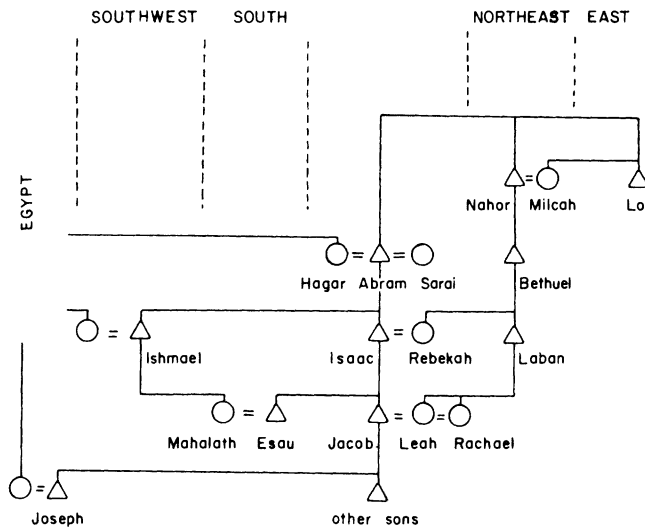


FIG. 4—Marriage alliances of Abram's lineage in the regions surrounding Canaan

political association. When Ishmael is provided a wife (Gen. 21: 21) it is from his mother's people: this is a pure marriage in terms of the alliance pattern of the stories. Moreover, the Ishmaelites directly represent a powerful kinship association, the "Arabs" or "Nomads."¹⁵ The linkage of Esau to Edom, also powerful and detached, maintains the interests of Abram's descendants in areas to the southwest through Esau's third marriage (Gen. 28: 6-9).

In addition, the political ascription of rank to Abram's sons is easily accomplished given a lineal link to Terah or an hypothesis of alliances that embrace Egypt and Mesopotamia (fig. 4). Abram stands as "firstborn" in a line which includes all Terahites. The distinction between Hagar and Sarai is primarily one of rank, but also one of origin. Thus, Sarai is a woman of rank among the Terahites and so represents the general interests of Abram's line to the northeast. Hagar, although a handmaiden, represents the general interests of Abram's line to the powerful Egyptian area on the southwest. Indeed, not only do Ishmael and Esau have marriages in a southwesterly direction, but Joseph moves to Egypt and eventually has Egyptian sons who become accepted by Israel (Gen. 48). Ishmael and Esau are indicated as shifting their position *vis-à-vis* their brothers and so are analogous to Joseph as "representatives" of Abram's line *outside* its primary zone of influence through authority. It is interesting to note, then, that Ishmael's loss was grieved by Abraham (Gen. 21: 8-14); Esau was the favorite of Isaac (Gen. 25: 28) and Joseph the favorite of Jacob (Gen. 37: 3-4). Given the early power of Egypt and Edom in the region, these sentiments ascribed to the fathers of Egypt-oriented characters seem proper; given the importance of sons in establishing hegemony in a locale the "sense of loss" of the stories is also proper. But

¹⁵ See I. Eph'al, "'Ishmael' and 'Arab(s)': A Transformation of Ethnological Terms," *JNES* 35

(1976):225-35 for a discussion of the relationship between the terms "Ishmael" and "Arab" or "Arabs."

the inheritance of political authority within the Terahite line by Isaac and Jacob is right, for the Terahite system stressed in the sources of Abrahamic genealogy drawn together by the redactor of Genesis is based in proper marriages (i.e., those appropriate with respect to kinship alliance).

If we plot the marriage relations of the Terahites as a system of indirect exchanges of women, then some link between the lines of Abram and Haran must be established, either direct or indirect (through additional patrilineages). A plausible, though by no means absolute confirmation of a link is found in the relationship of Lot to Abram. Lot travels to Haran with Terah (Gen. 11: 31, P source) but later goes to Canaan in the company of Abram (Gen. 12: 5, P source). The Priestly identification of Lot as *brother's son* provides specificity for the rather equivocal identification of Lot in the Yahwist source—*ʾāh*=, "brother," or, more likely, "kinsman." For persons familiar with the cultural context of the Yahwist stories such a clarification might have seemed redundant. Even for the Priestly culture the specific ascription of relationship may have been introduced for reasons unrelated to the function of defining a marriage link between patrilineages. But it is possible that the redaction of Genesis 11 and 12 is intended as a "clarification" of an element of social organization. The link between Abram and Lot not only depicts two Terahites traveling together, but Lot is in a scenario which is identical in many respects to that in which Jacob deals with Laban. The ultimate themes of "conflict" and "resolution of conflict through separation" (Gen. 31 and 32: 1-3, Gen. 13) strongly reflect situations of alliance through marriage. Thus, it is possible that even though Lot's wife is not specifically identified, the material of the sources and the redaction is intended to show that Lot is to Abram as Jacob is to Laban, wife-taker to wife-giver. It is structurally and behaviorally "correct" that Lot should be with Abram to perform brideservice in a system of alliance, thus allowing the relational scheme shown in fig. 5, where Terah is the symbol of all the groups of the alliance—a fictive relationship.¹⁶

Presented as a geographic array (fig. 6) the Terahites are a well-defined connubium. Indeed, it is likely that the geographic relations of the patriarchal cycles were used to stress the nature of political alliance. But it is difficult to determine whether Lot is depicted as father of the Moabites and Ammonites (a) because of their historic locations, in an effort to emphasize the marriage systems as an ideal; or (b) because an ancient alliance system of the region involved was represented through idealized characters. The words of Alt seem appropriate here: "... these traditions are clearly dominated by the double tendency to reduce everything to the personal triumph of the hero, and at the same time to expand it into something that happened to the whole

¹⁶ Beyond this argument, the continued interest of Abram in Lot's welfare (Gen. 14: 13-16 and Gen. 18: 22-33) suggests a close kin tie, but there is no compelling evidence that the cyclic alliance system posited for the Terahites was intended by the Genesis redaction. The structure is tempting because it provides a basis for the alliance of Jacob's sons. Here the literary concatenation is drawn to propose the ideal for a non-cyclical system, perhaps, but the ideal form implies the cyclical potential of three closely related patrilineages. A potential development of the alli-

ance interpretation of the relationship between Abraham and Lot provides a justification for the establishment of the Israel alliance group. If the ABRAM lineage is in the position of wife-giver to the HARAN lineage, then the sons of Lot should receive wives from the ABRAM line, specifically from Jacob's son's generation. But the ascribed incestuous origin of the Moabites and Ammonites (Gen. 19: 30-38) and the uncircumcised status of Lot and his descendants make them as undesirable as the Shechemites (Gen. 34: 14).

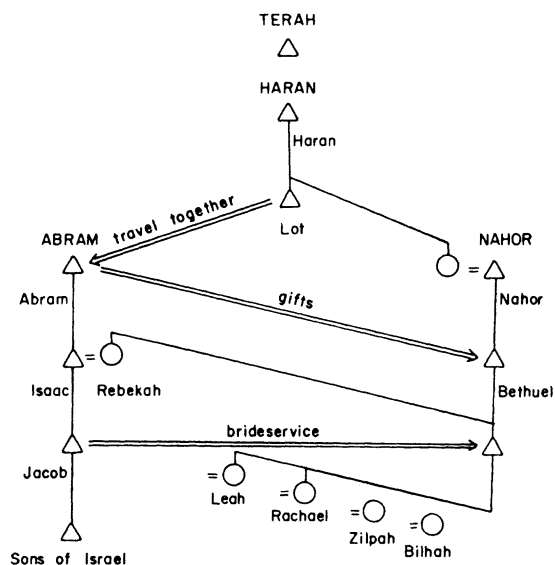


FIG. 5—Key relationships of the proposed Terahite connubium

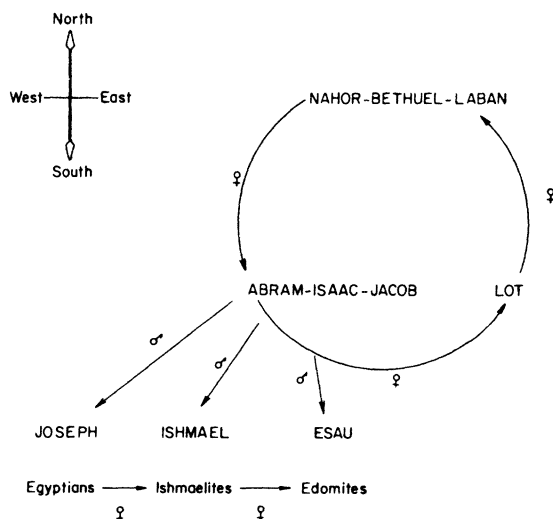


FIG. 6—Ideal relationships of groups surrounding Canaan presented as a geographic array

nation.”¹⁷ This suggests the notion of the “story as social model” which makes sense to me, at least, in grappling with the kinship representations of Genesis. For this reason, I favor the interpretation that the ideal system is being emphasized, even though the sources may have had real situations to use as illustrations, and the redactor may have had a *real* system of “historic” groups in mind.

This conclusion is supported by the movement of Ishmael, Esau, and Joseph into the region of other possible exchange systems. In fact, in the context of kinship arguments it is difficult to decide whether (a) Joseph, Ishmael, and Esau are merely “adoptions” or “fictive links” designed to assert relationships; or (b) actual alliances with groups of superior strength to the southwest. I believe that a hypothesis of fictive ties—or perhaps better, contrived ties—is more acceptable, since there are important differences in the relationships of Ishmael, Esau, and Joseph to Abram. First, the patrilineages established by Ishmael and Esau are segmented from the Terahite connubium, while two patrilineages descended from Joseph’s Egyptian wife (Gen. 41: 50-53), Manasseh and Ephraim, are accepted as sons by Jacob (Gen. 48). The statement of Jacob (Gen. 48: 6) that children of Joseph other than Manasseh and Ephraim were not accepted “for the purpose of their inheritance”—not surprisingly a fragment of P material—underscores two major points: (a) Israel is “adopting” two patrilineages; and (b) Egypt is not considered as “in an alliance” with Israel by virtue of Joseph’s marriage. Second, the wife-giving/wife-taking relationships of Egypt, the Shur district, and Edom are established completely in the identification of the wives of Ishmael and Esau. In a marriage system of indirect exchange, the more distant a group is the more unlikely it is that direct ties of marriage alliance will be established. Thus, to claim lineal relationships to Edom and Shur is realistic, but to claim the same for Egypt is fantastic. Moreover, to avoid a direct claim of marriage alliance to the southwest on a continuing basis—in a pattern similar to that of the Terahite association—is probably simply an historically accurate element of the sources and the redaction.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that genealogical materials and story content contribute to a coherent image of the kinship systems with which the patriarchs and later holders of patriarchal tradition were familiar. This coherence has not necessarily gone unnoticed in earlier studies, but understanding of the kinship system as involving a framework for matrimonial alliances carries implications for the interpretation of the patriarchal lineages and later organizations of Israel. It appears that “Israel” as a political organization represents a *form* of the same order as the “Terahite association”—a marriage alliance system of patrilineages who either actually or fictively trace ties to a common ancestor. Yet it is also possible to derive from the specifics of the patriarchal stories some rules for the interpretation of succession in such systems.

It has long been noted that the succession of the patriarchal system seems to progress through younger sons in spite of a rule of primogeniture: from Abram through Isaac, Jacob, Benjamin, ultimately to Saul; from Abram through Isaac,

¹⁷ Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, p. 4.

Jacob, Judah, ultimately to David.¹⁸ This analysis has shown, however, that the differentiation of Ishmael and Isaac, and later of Esau and Jacob, is based upon the appropriateness of marriages into which each entered. Indeed, it was shown that the marriages of Ishmael and Isaac were "proper" according to the background of their mothers. Further, it was shown that Esau's marriages reinforce the ideals of the marriage system through their inappropriateness.

We may conclude that the significant factors for determination of marriage preference for an individual of the Genesis system include, minimally: (a) the identity of the mother in an alliance group; (b) the identity of the father in a region of potential alliance groups. Further, the factors determining succession in a patrilineal association (agnatic group) include: (a) the rank of a brother among brothers born to a particular woman; (b) the rank of brothers born to a man, as determined by the ranks of their respective mothers. Thus, the mother's status determines in large part the preferred marriage association, even if the "rule" were stated in terms of a patrilateral preference. Further, while the differentiation of sons born to a particular mother shows instances of ultimogeniture (succession of the youngest), the practice of primogeniture determines the rank of competing women.

Following these factors the succession of the Davidic line over that of Saul is defined in the patriarchal genealogies and marriage system. Reuben, Simeon, and Levi are passed over by Jacob when he offers his blessings to his sons (Gen. 49: 2-7). This places the birthright on the shoulders of Judah (who is broadly praised—Gen. 49: 8-12), next in line of the six sons of Leah. Joseph, the elder son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, is blessed, but he gains authority over his brothers only in Egypt. Thus, if there is contention for leadership of Israel which is justified in the Genesis materials, it is between the descendants of Benjamin (that line represented as "youngest") and Judah (that line represented through the primogeniture model).¹⁹

The relationship between kinship model and political realities, even in modern settings, is often difficult to document. In the case of the formative period of Israel, the difficulties are compounded tremendously. The aggregations of people who came to be associated as the "Israel tribes" almost certainly came together on the basis of common political aspirations and fictive kinship reckoning.²⁰ Therefore, the represen-

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Indeed, the instances of exception to the rule of primogeniture are extraordinary. The kinship principles which regulate succession, however, are complex, involving the interaction of several rules which take into consideration diverse conditions of individual status, both ascribed and achieved. The "system" is characterized by "rules" which may define what will happen or interpret what does happen, depending upon how actual situations are viewed by the actors within the action. Such flexibility allows for a kind of pragmatism in political activity which could never occur in a rigid system of rules; see F. G. Bailey, *Strategems and Spoils: A Social Anthropology of Politics* (New York, 1969).

²⁰ Joseph is of less importance on two counts. First, he is the son of the younger daughter; second, he is the eldest son. The rule of primogeniture appears to hold in only a very few of the kin lists of

the Old Testament. But then, great pains are taken to obscure the discrimination of the elder and younger son. This is overtly the theme of Isaac's blessing of Jacob instead of Esau (Gen 27: 1-45), but there is subtle ambiguity in the relative status of Perez and Zerah (Gen. 38: 27-30) and Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen. 41: 40-57; and Gen. 48). While Abram is the eldest of three sons (Gen. 11: 27-32), Bethuel is the last noted (youngest) of eight (Gen. 22: 20-24). Ultimately, David is the last noted of seven sons born to Perez's descendant Jesse (1 Chron. 2: 9-17). Again, there is no "rule" indicated in the combined genealogical materials; rather, a set of rules allow political realities to be freely justified in the presentation of gross relationships. But at the critical point of definition of Israel, given the kinship principles presented in Genesis, Judah is in position to claim pre-eminence legitimately.

tation of political and systematic relationships which has come down to us in the Genesis redaction probably represents a culturally well-focused version of the state of political affairs during a particular period. From this point of view, the final oral stages of the patriarchal traditions and perhaps some of the early written versions of the traditions appear to relate solidly to Judah and the Davidic legitimation.²¹ This conclusion may have implications for the current debate concerning the dating of the patriarchs.²² It should be warned, however, that in a well-controlled chiefdom, much more in a kingdom, the specifics of legitimizing kinship justifications can be long maintained in oral tradition with little alteration. Thus, to identify the dominant thrust of the Genesis redaction in the area of Davidic legitimation does not confine the process of redaction completely to the Davidic period. The suggestion is that the version which has come to us is essentially Davidic, embellished later, and founded in the oral traditions of those peoples who identified with Judah and the Judeans.

²¹ A major work by N. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1000 B.C.* (New York, in press) considers some of these aspirations and the conditions which inspired and maintained the Israel political entity.

²² It is necessary to elaborate here briefly. We may presume that most groups of the region had oral traditions recounting real and fictive connections, often involving the same or similar personages. Further, it is common in such oral genealogies and stories for regional heroes to be incorporated for the purposes of political ascription and cultural identification. Thus, as Alt (*Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, pp. 1-77) argued a half-century ago, it is probable that the historical personages behind the patriarchal figures date from different periods and relate to slightly different subcultures. Yet, of the many organizations of the regional cultural material which were extant in oral tradition, only a few have come down to us in the documents of early Near Eastern history. The version

critical to us here, like all other versions, should reflect the biases of refinement under the influences of political realities. The important question concerns "what" political realities are reflected in the redaction of Genesis which has come to us. These things considered, the historical continuity of the persons depicted are of limited importance, and even the genealogical links drawn laterally (such as that between Israel's "sons") are important only in that they serve as culturally specific backdrop against which particular lines and individuals are stressed.

See J. Gammie, "Theological Interpretation by Way of Literary and Tradition Analysis: Genesis 25-36" in M. Buss, ed., *Encounter with the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible* (Philadelphia, 1979); J. Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven, 1975); J. Hayes and J. Miller, *Israelite and Judaeon History* (Philadelphia, 1977); T. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Berlin, 1974).